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*The Importance, Progress and Influence
of Rural Pursuits.*

A

LECTURE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture,

AT

FITCHBURG, DECEMBER 2, 1873.

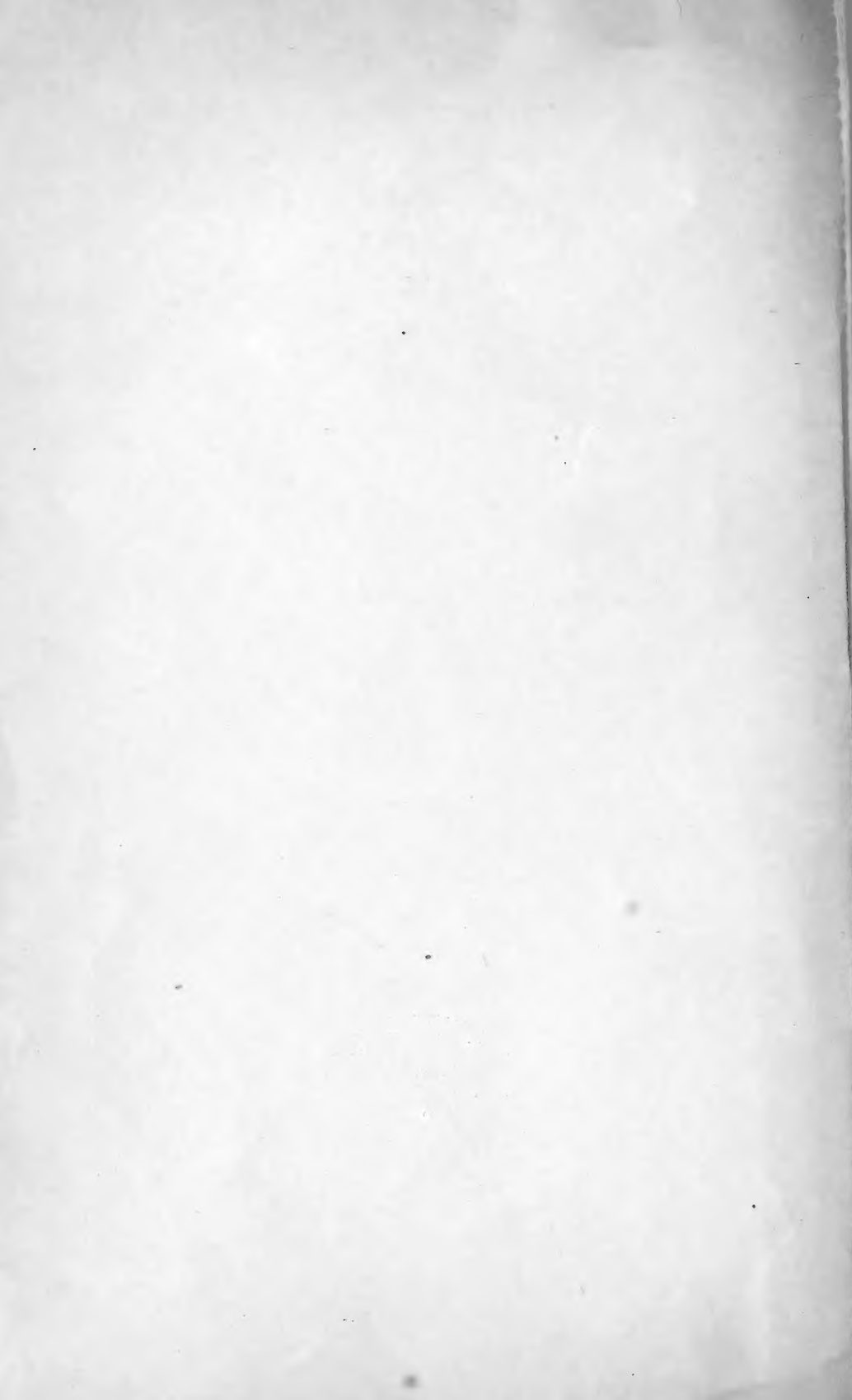
BY

HON. MARSHALL P. WILDER.

BOSTON:

WRIGHT & POTTER, STATE PRINTERS,
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LECTURE.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:—I have accepted the invitation to address you this evening, not from the expectation of communicating much that is new, and even at the risk of repeating some thoughts that I may have uttered on other occasions. But having been intimately associated with this Board at its organization, and honored for so many years with a voice in its councils, I could not decline any service which it might be in my power to render.

I have selected for the theme of my subject of this evening, the *importance, progress and influence of rural pursuits*.

I had not the pleasure to hear the lecture of Secretary Flint, and I fear I may travel over some of the ground which he has so ably surveyed.

To enforce the *importance* of rural pursuits before this enlightened audience, or to illustrate by an extended eulogium their benign influences in promoting the welfare of mankind, were almost like an attempt to prove that the sun imparts light and heat; that his radiant beams cause the seed to germinate, the leaf to unfold, and the harvest to ripen. But as it is by line upon line and precept upon precept that we treasure up the lessons of experience, so let us again this evening contemplate the importance of agriculture, the value and progress of science as applied to this and other arts, and the happy and refining influences which flow from rural life. "Agriculture," said Washington, and it cannot be too often repeated, "is the most healthful, the most useful, and most

honorable employment of man." "In the science of agriculture," said the late Dr. Hitchcock, "is involved a great principle which reaches through indefinite generations, and forms the basis of all possible improvement, and the highest hopes of our race." Agriculture was the first employment, and has ever been the most important given to man. Before the furnace had melted the ore, or the anvil had forged the ax, before the woodman had felled a tree or built a hut, before the waters had propelled a wheel or the white-winged messenger of commerce had spread its sails, "God planted a garden in Eden," and commanded man "to dress and keep it." And when by his disobedience he was sent forth as a wanderer in the earth, "to till the ground from whence he was *taken*," he carried with him the Divine decree, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread until thou return unto the ground." Such were the absolute commands, and such the primary conditions upon which must ever depend the sustenance of the whole human family. Yes, my friends, blot out the productions of the earth for a single month, and our race would become extinct. "To till the ground from whence thou wert taken," as a means of subsistence, and "to eat bread in the sweat of thy face," were the merciful mandates which have echoed in the ears of all past generations, and which will continue to reverberate through the ages of all coming time. This universal demand for daily bread must be satisfied with the rising of every sun, or the pulse of life would cease to beat.

"This cry, with never ceasing sound,
Circles creation's ample round."

On former occasions I have alluded to the astounding results which have been developed by the progress of science and civilization during the present century. In no previous age have the energies of the world been so concentrated in efforts to economize time, increase power, multiply the comforts

and elevate the condition of mankind. The adventurous spirit of modern times has brought forth discoveries and inventions equally remarkable in all the departments of life. No project is too great, no enterprise too grand for the spirit of the age. How remarkable the scale of development! How wonderful the genius of man! How sublime the conquest of mind!

Before entering more fully into the subject of which I am to speak this evening, let us for a moment contemplate some of the events which have transpired in our own age. Many are now living who can remember the time when not a loom was propelled by water, not an engine driven by steam, not an iron rail or a telegraph wire, not a reaper or mower, in all our broad land. Some here remember the time when there was not a steam-engine in all New England, not a pound of anthracite coal used for fire or furnace, not a steamboat traversing the waters of this continent. It is only about eighty-five years since John Fitch, of Philadelphia, first applied steam to his boat, the "Perseverance," on the Delaware River,—the first attempt in America to use steam for navigation, predicting with the foresight of a prophet, as he did in his letter to Benjamin Franklin, that the power of this agent would ultimately navigate the rivers, lakes and oceans of the world.

How marvellous the power developed by steam! Man places a ton of coal in an improved Corliss engine, and it produces for industry the labor which requires three hundred and sixty-five days of a strong man; and it is stated on authority, that the power developed by coal imported into Massachusetts accomplishes more for industry than could be done if all the forty millions of men, women and children of the United States should devote themselves to manual labor, and that the machinery moved by coal in Great Britain, equals the man-power of all the inhabitants of the globe. Suppress the use of steam,

this modern motive-power which moves the machinery of the world, and it would consign the better half of all its industries to the grave; annihilate this almost omnipotent force, and the shades of night would shroud with an eternal eclipse half of the glories of modern civilization. But what shall we say of the printing-press, that tremendous agent for good or evil,—the press which in the days of our Franklin could only produce with wearisome toil a few hundred newspapers per day, when compared with the mighty steam-press, throwing off with almost the velocity of light, hundreds of thousands in a day, and scattering them like leaves of the forest at almost every hamlet in our land. Nor can I fail to allude, in this connection, to some of the astonishing improvements which have taken place in the present century, in the manufacture of textile fabrics, for which this county of Middlesex is so justly renowned. The old spinning-wheels and hand-looms of our youthful days, working with toil and treadle to produce a few yards of cloth per day, have been supplanted by the magnificent machinery of gigantic mills, like those of Lowell and Lawrence, turning out their miles of cloth per day, and rivalling in power, production and competition the manufacturing cities of the Old World.

Human pursuits are so intimately connected with each other, that an improvement in one tends to the advancement of them all. Hence the *rural* arts have been equally benefited with other callings by the discoveries of science, and the application of skill. How wonderful the improvements in labor-saving machines as applied to the arts of husbandry! Some of us remember following the old wooden plough. This has been exchanged for the model iron and steel plough, suited to hill and dale, and to all soils and situations; and, still more strange, for the steam-plough, rolling over its numerous furrows at once, and performing the work of days in an hour, and ere long to become the great engine for the

West. The old scythe and sickle of our fathers, hanging, like harps upon the willows, have given place to the improved mowers and reapers, sweeping down their ten acres per day, or to the great Western harvester, moving over the broad prairie like a triumphal car, cutting, gathering and storing twenty acres per day. The old noisy flail, pummelling out only a few bushels per day, has yielded to the mighty thresher, travelling from field to field, shelling, cleaning and running into bags hundreds of bushels of grain per day. But I must not prolong this train of thought, nor can I even enumerate the multitude of labor-saving implements which the genius of man has invented for the relief of toil in our own time.

I must not, however, omit to mention the great improvement which has taken place in our horses, cattle, sheep and swine; in their classification, adaptation to various soils, markets, and uses.

It is less than eighty years since the introduction of the Shorthorn breed of cattle. Now, witness the fine herds of Mr. Whitman and others. To such perfection has the Duchess strain been bred, that at a sale lately made in the State of New York, one cow, the Duchess of Geneva, brought forty thousand dollars, her calf of five months twenty-seven thousand dollars, the whole herd of one hundred and eight animals realizing three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, or over three thousand dollars per head. Witness, also, the improvement which has taken place in other breeds, in the same or a less period of time; in the Ayrshires, as seen in the splendid herds of Birnie, Sturtevant, Miles, and others; in the Jerseys of Burnett (carrying off all the prizes at the late New York Exhibition), Bowditch, and Adams of a hundred head. The fine Kerrys of Mr. Grinnell, of Greenfield, and last though least in size, the beautiful Brittanies, imported by our Secretary Flint, so useful for small families and limited grounds. Sim-

ilar advances have taken place in the improvement of other animals, especially the horse, as in the studs of General Russell, David Nevins, Joseph H. Billings, and others, some of which, for stock purposes, corresponding with the highest prices for cattle.

Nor should I forget to allude to the vast area of our cereal crops, rightly termed the exhaustless granary of the world, and upon which the nations of Europe are mainly dependent to make up the deficiency of their crops, England demanding a hundred million and France fifty million bushels for the present year. How would our Pilgrim Fathers have rejoiced, when rendering special thanks to the God of harvests for their annual crop of twenty bushels of corn, six bushels of oats and pease, could they, with prophetic eye, have seen the thousand million of bushels in our annual crop, a crop of grain sufficient to give a bushel each to every man, woman and child on the face of the globe. Nor would I omit to mention the mountainous piles of cotton, without which for a single year, the commercial world would be stricken with dismay. Why, it is not a hundred years since the first five bales of cotton exported to Liverpool were seized as a contraband article in the belief that no such product as cotton could be grown on American soil, a product that now reaches the wondrous amount of sixteen hundred millions of pounds, and produces an income of three hundred millions of dollars annually.

And have you ever, my friends, duly considered the advantages and privileges which exist at the present day as compared with olden times? It is only about ninety years since the first agricultural society was established on this continent. Your own Middlesex Society, one of the oldest in the State, dates back to only 1794. It is only about twenty years since this Board of Agriculture, one of the first in this country, was formed. It is only about twenty years since the first Ag-

ricultural College of our Union was formed. Now, the majority of our States have colleges and Boards of agriculture. And so numerous have agricultural, horticultural and kindred institutions become, that they may be counted by the thousand. Let me also mention in this connection, the knowledge which has been acquired in the arts of hybridization and cross-fertilization, by which numerous and valuable varieties of grains, vegetables, fruits and flowers have been produced. Within our own recollection, the process was but imperfectly known or practised. Now, to such perfection has this art arrived, that every year produces new and superior sorts, which are alike renowned for excellence in the best European catalogues.

Let me also allude to the amazing progress of fruit culture during the last half of this century. In this pursuit, Massachusetts has been a pioneer and leader, and from whence emanated, primarily, much of the enterprise which has spread throughout our land. Fifty years ago the list of fruits was limited to a very few varieties, which were mostly confined to the gardens and orchards of the opulent and wealthy. Then, with a few exceptions, the fruits were of a common or ordinary quality. Now, we have collections of the apple and pear consisting of hundreds of varieties, many of which possess all the characteristics of a first-rate fruit, and instead of here and there an orchard on the Atlantic and a few varieties for the summer season, we now have thousands of orchards and gardens with fruits adapted to every section of our country, and fruit for almost every month in the year. Then, the cultivation of the grape had received scarcely any attention, except its culture under glass. It is not fifty years since the Isabella and Catawba were brought to notice. Now, we have numerous varieties raised from seed, and hundreds of vineyards scattered all over our land. And so great have been the improvements in packing, and the facilities of transportation,

that our markets are supplied with this delicious fruit, even to the winter months. Nor is this all : the juice of the grape, the manufacture of wine, has not only become an article of commerce, but rivals in quality, and finds a market in, the old wine countries of Europe. What would Mr. Longworth, of Cincinnati, the great pioneer in American wine culture, have said, when planting the cuttings of the Catawba and Isabella grapes in 1829, if he could have foreseen that the cultivation of the grape would at this time have been extended through twenty-five degrees of latitude, and from ocean to ocean ; that European varieties, without the aid of glass, would be grown in California with as much ease as in the most favored portions of the globe ; that the grape would be as common in our markets as the apple, and sometimes sold almost at as low a price ; that the products of wine would exceed ten millions of gallons annually ; that a sale of champagne wine to the amount of forty thousand dollars should be made for exportation to the wine regions of Europe ; and still more remarkable, that this wine, the Great Western, of the Pleasant Valley Wine Company, should bear off, triumphantly, a first prize for champagne wines, at the World's Great Exhibition in Vienna the present year.

Nor is this progress more wonderful than the improvement and advancement which has taken place in the cultivation of our small fruits. Then, with the exception of two or three varieties of the strawberry, raspberry, and the blackberry, we were confined to the wild species of the hedge-row and the field. It is but about forty years since Mr. Hovey, of Cambridge, raised the first American variety of the strawberry from seed. Now, numerous local varieties, adapted to all sections, make their appearance every year, and so universal has this fruit become as an article for general use, and so great the improvement in packing and the facilities for interchange of products, that our Northern markets are supplied, instead

of a few weeks, as formerly, with this delicious fruit, from May to August. So extensive has its cultivation become, that from single railroad stations in several of our States have been dispatched a thousand or more bushels per day for market. In districts where no attention had been given to the cultivation of this fruit twenty years ago, millions of baskets are sold in addition to what is consumed at home.

Nor can we omit the peach, of which such astonishing quantities are sent to the market daily from the Southern, Western and Middle States, especially to New York city, which receives on some days from the various railroads and steamboats an aggregate of about a hundred thousand bushels, and all this in addition to the immense quantities canned and distributed to all portions of the globe.

When I reflect upon the rapid progress of American Pomology in my own day, and its salutary influence on the health and happiness of mankind, the more grateful am I to those benevolent men who opened the way for this new era which distinguishes the fruit culture of our country. How grateful to the feelings of all who have worked with us in this progress, is the prospect which opens to us in the great future of our country! How would Governor Winthrop have rejoiced, when planting his pippin on our harbor island; Peregrine White, when planting his apple-tree at Plymouth; William Blackstone, when planting his orchard on Boston Common; Governor Endicott, when planting his pear-tree, which still survives, at Salem, could they have foreseen the influence of their example multiplied into the thousands of orchards, and the millions upon millions of fruits which are produced in our country! And how would the pioneers of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society have exulted, could they have had a vision of the unrivalled exhibitions made at its annual shows, and especially at the late national display in Boston by the American Pomological Society, rivalling in variety,

extent and excellence, it is believed, any which has been made by other nations,—where States which had not cultivated a fruit-tree sixteen years ago, received the highest prize for apples!

One of the most gratifying evidences of progress and refinement, is the general love and appreciation of fruits and flowers. These have been too often considered as the mere superfluities of life, but the more we are brought into communion with them, the more shall we realize those pure and refined sensations which inspire the soul with love and devotion to Him who clothes the fields with a radiance, to which Solomon in all his glory could only aspire.

The cultivation of the garden, the ornamental planting of our grounds, and the general use of flowers afford striking proof of the high state of civilization which marks the progress of the present age. Within our own recollection the use of flowers at funerals was deemed improper, nor was their appearance in the sanctuary greeted with pleasure. They were thought to be inconsistent with the proprieties of divine worship, as diverting the mind, and detracting from the solemnities of the occasion. God was not seen in flowers, in the rose, or the lily of the valley. From the lovely forms and various hues of flowers, the glories and joys of the garden, the royal psalmist has derived some of the highest types of inspiration, the artist some of his finest conceptions of grace and beauty. We cannot therefore too highly or gratefully appreciate that divine wisdom and benevolence which has surrounded us with these manifestations of His perfection and glory, these beautiful creations,—

“Mingled and made by love, to one great end.”

How delightful is the pleasure of communing with those lovely objects nourished and cherished by your own care, and which you almost imagine to be susceptible to your sympathy

and love! "The garden," said Lord Bacon, "is the purest of human pleasures; it is the greatest refreshment to the spirit of man; without which, buildings and palaces are but gross handiworks; and a man shall ever see, that, when ages grow to civility and elegance, men come to *build* stately, sooner than to *garden* finely; as if gardening were the greater perfection." "Nothing" said the immortal Webster, "is too polished to see its beauty, nothing too refined to be capable of its enjoyment." So thought the king of Israel when he made for himself gardens and orchards. So thought the noble Scipio when he retired to his favorite retreat after he had made Rome the mistress of the world. So thought our own Pickering, Lowell, Dearborn, and thousands of others in our own time, who have retired from the busy haunts of the city to the quiet scenes of rural life, that they might enjoy the rich gifts of bounteous nature, and drink from those pure fountains of contentment and peace. And may I not add what experience has taught me of the sacred influences of rural life to soothe and comfort in those hours of depression, sickness and sorrow, from which none are exempt. Here, then, amidst fruits and flowers, and scenes of rural bliss, let my remaining days be passed, and at last, like fruit fully ripe, dropping softly on the bosom of mother earth, let me lie down to rest in the joyous hope of a glorious immortality in the garden of the Lord, where the tree of life beareth fruit every month, where blight, disease, and the wintry blast of death shall never come, where the summer of glory and perfection shall forever reign.

Some of the most touching and beautiful, some of the most sacred and sublime inspirations of Scripture have been drawn from scenes in the garden. Nor has the imagination of the poet, philosopher, or psalmist, ever conceived of any spot more chastening, more refining or more hallowed in its influence.

“ Though in heaven the trees

Of life, ambrosial fruitage bear, and vines

Yield nectar; though from off the boughs, each morn

We brush mellifluous dews; yet God hath here

Varied his bounty so with new delights,

As may compare with heaven.”

In no department of cultivation is improvement of taste to be more distinctly seen, than in the decoration of our grounds and the universal love of trees and plants. Many in this assembly can remember the time when there were but few greenhouses in New England, and these were almost entirely confined to our retired and wealthy citizens. Now, these plant-structures are to be seen in almost all our populous towns and villages, and so much has the taste and demand for plants and flowers increased, that many are devoted to special culture of the rose, the violet, or some other plant. Nor is this taste confined to the rich or middling class. Now, almost every dwelling has its grape-vine or fruit-tree, its woodbine, scarlet-runner or morning glory. Even window-gardening has become a science, and few are so poor whose home may not be lit up with the cheering influence of a plant or flower, whose windows may not become more hallowed by the sweet influences of nature's bloom, than by the gaudy pageant-pane which perpetuates the name of a saint,—perhaps a sinner too. And I confess my heart has often been touched with tenderness and sympathy when I have seen the poor laborer, after a hard day's work, carrying under his arm a rose or geranium to cheer and solace the wife and weans at home. These are the outer manifestations of the soul for that fairer and better clime where flowers shall never fade, the secret yearnings for that paradise beyond the skies which shall never be lost again.

I have spoken freely of the chastening influence of rural pursuits; but before I close, allow me to allude again to flowers; to those symbols of all that is pure, lovely and beauti-

ful,—those golden stars, that like the dew-drops of morning, sparkle on the bosom of mother earth. Flowers are the very embodiment of beauty ; flowers are like angel spirits ministering to the finest sensibilities of our nature, often inspiring us with thoughts, which, like the unexpressed prayer, lie too deep for utterance. God speaks by flowers and plants and trees, as well as by the lips of his prophets and priests. So felt Bacon, who desired always to have flowers before him when exploring the mysteries of that divine philosophy which has made his name immortal. Flowers have a language, and like the starry firmament above, proclaim His handiwork and glory. God has imprinted a language on every leaf that flutters in the breeze, on every flower that unfolds its virgin bosom to the sun, teaching us the great lesson of his wisdom, perfection and glory. How beautifully does the English bard express this sentiment,—

“Your voiceless lips, O flowers, are living preachers ;
Each cup a pulpit, and each leaf a book.”

Who would not listen to their teachings ! How intimately do they enter into our joys and affections ! Who would not live with them forever ! With what tenderness and affection does Milton describe the sorrow of our mother Eve when bidding farewell to her flowers in Eden,—

“O flowers
That never will in other climate grow,
My early visitation, and my last
At even, which I bred up with tender hand
From the first opening bud, and gave ye names,
Who now shall rear ye to the sun, or rank
Your tribes, and water from the ambrosial fount ?”

And here let me recognize the refining and chastening influence of woman, which so signally characterizes the progress of civilization, and the finer arts of modern times. This is especially to be seen in her interest for the cultivation of fruits and flowers, and the adornment of “sweet, sweet

home." It is but a few years since woman was permitted to grace the festive board of our agricultural and horticultural exhibitions. Now, no occasion of this kind is deemed complete without her presence. Formerly our tables were surrounded only with the stalks of humanity; now they are adorned with the flowers of female loveliness, not "born to blush unseen." Nor is this all; she is now among our most successful cultivators, training with tenderness and care plants as delicate as her own person. Welcome woman, then, we say, to these festal occasions, to the grounds we cultivate, to our gardens and greenhouses, to all the beauties of nature and the pleasures of art, and to a paradise regained on earth.

Another strong evidence of the progress of refined taste and culture is seen in the establishment of our cemeteries, and the improvement of our burying-grounds. These once neglected and gloomy resting-places of the dead, casting terror and horror on the minds of children and youth, are fast giving way to the shady retreats and sylvan scenes of the wood and forest. Where formerly decaying grass, tangled weeds, and moss-covered tablets were generally to be seen, now may be witnessed beautiful sites, natural scenery and embellished lots, which awaken sensations that no language can describe, where the meandering path wends you to the spot in which rest the remains of the loved and lost of earth, where the rustling pine mournfully sighs in the passing breeze, the willow weeps in responsive grief, and where the verdurous evergreen, breathing in perennial life, is a fit emblem of those celestial fields, where the leaf shall never wither, the flower never fade, and fruition never end.

I have thus spoken to you, my friends, in a manner which I hope may not be considered as inappropriate or irrelevant to the mission of this Board. My object has been to record some of the important events which mark the progress of our age,—to illustrate the advantages which flow from sci-

entific knowledge as connected with the genius and enterprise of man,—to awaken and excite a love for rural life and rural pursuits, and to show that the present is an advance on the past in all that pertains to a higher state of civilization and the welfare of our race.

And now, in conclusion, let me say, I know of no better temporal acquisition than a happy rural home,—a home where you may sit amid the fruiting of your trees and the blooming of your plants,—a home embellished by your own taste, and endeared by pleasures shared in common with the loved ones of your family—a happy country home, with trees and fruits and flowers, where you may find enjoyment, not in hungry greed for gold, not in the conflicts for political distinction, not in the strife for place, power or renown. For more than fifty years I have trod the crowded marts of trade and commerce. I have shared in the privileges and perplexities of public service, and I have enjoyed the soul-reviving sympathy of family and friends, but I have never forgotten my first love for rural life. Oh, no ; whenever I could rescue a little time from the cares of business,—whether at rosy morn, golden noon or declining day, I have fled to the garden and greenhouse, to my favorite trees and plants, that I might commune and coöperate with nature in her secret laboratory of wonder-working power. This is my idea of a happy, rural home ; and this my idea of a happy man,—he who is contented with fruits and flowers reared by his own care, with congenial friends, and a good conscience towards God and his fellow-men. And it has ever appeared to me that contentment and happiness were easily to be acquired by all who really love the cultivation of these lovely objects. And let me add, that I know of no more grateful, and I was about to say, devotional feelings, than those which we enjoy at the close of a quiet Sabbath summer day, when with wife and children we stroll along the bordered flowery walks, or sit in sweet con-

verse under the umbrageous trees your hands have planted, just as the declining sun is fringing the horizon with rosy promise of a fairer to-morrow, and parting day is ushering universal nature to repose.

I have spoken thus freely of the benign influences of rural life and rural pursuits, for I have ever believed that an intimate relation exists between the beautiful, and things which are morally good ; I trust therefore that my friends with whom I have labored so long, will pardon me for the allusions to myself. From my early years I have been fond of contemplating the glorious works of creation and Providence. I love the sublime as well as the beautiful in nature. I love to hear the thunder roll its treble diapason through the skies. I love to see the lightning flash its fiery gleam from pole to pole, and I delight to muse with nature in her more tranquil and enchanting scenes of rural bliss. I love the genial spring, filling the heart with joys renewed, and hopes of abundant harvest ; the golden summer, marshalling its gorgeous retinue of successive glories ; the mellow autumn, pouring from her horn of plenty the ripened treasures of the year. And especially do I love to be associated with the members of this Board in efforts to improve and increase the products of the earth,—something to promote the comfort, happiness, and welfare of my fellow-men,—something that shall live when we are dead.







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